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A SELECTION OF AUSTRALIAN FLOWER PAINTINGS BY FERDINAND BAUER

P. S. Green

Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, Richmond, Surrey, England

The publication in February 1976 of 'The Australian Flower Paintings of Ferdinand Bauer' by the Basilisk Press with an introduction by Wilfrid Blunt and botanical text by William T. Stearn is particularly worthy of note. This is so not only because of the volume's obvious size, quality and price, but because it makes available to a wider public a selection of 25 of the outstanding plant drawings of Ferdinand Bauer, nearly all of them previously unpublished. At a selling price of £420 few people will afford to purchase a copy, nor will many libraries, but such an outstanding publication calls for comment and for an account within reach of all to read.

Ferdinand Bauer and his elder brother Franz (or Francis as he later came to be known) are between them, in the opinion of many people, the greatest botanical artists of all time; not only because of the exceptionally high quality of the lifelike and aesthetically pleasing plant portraits they painted, but because they included in their compositions careful, painstaking, botanically significant and accurate dissections and enlargements of the flower parts. It may be argued that it is the very addition of these drawings of selected and magnified parts which marks off botanical art from plant portraiture, yet, with the Bauers, the whole forms a composition of such quality and beauty as to represent one of the highest forms of art. It is interesting to note, however, that Ferdinand Bauer's work did not always include such detailed studies, as may be seen by comparing his plates in Sibthorpe & Smith's famous 'Flora Graeca' (1806-1840) with the paintings in the work under review, a change in practice which, according to Stearn, is attributable to the influence and inspiration of Robert Brown. (Incidentally, a similar change in a work portraying present-day drawings of Australian plants may be seen by comparing the first part of 'The Endemic Flora of Tasmania' by Margaret Stones & Winifred Curtis (1967) with those which have been published subsequently where Miss Stones has skilfully added enlargements of the botanically important details to her beautiful portraits of Tasmanian plants).

Despite the undoubted quality of Ferdinand Bauer's drawings his output was remarkable; on his expedition to Australia between 1801 and 1805, and often under the most adverse and cramped conditions at sea, he made more than 2000 drawings of natural history objects, some three-quarters of which were Australian plants (including some from Norfolk Island). Over three hundred of these are today in the collections of the British Museum (Natural History), 236 meticulously finished paintings of plants and 89 of animals. Very few have ever been published, even in black and white, and it is from among these paintings that the 25 plates used in this recent work have been carefully selected. Only three appear to have been published before and none of them exactly as they appear in this work. Plate 6, *Flindersia australis*, was used as the first plate in the atlas that accompanied Flinders' 'Voyage to Terra Australis' (1814), although in black and white; Plate 15, *Brunonia australis*, appeared as a rather crude and somewhat modified line drawing in the *Transactions of the Linnean Society*, Volume 10, as Plate 29 in 1811 (the beautiful coloured drawing of this same species which constituted Plate 10 in Bauer's 'Illustrationes Florae Novae Hollandiae' (1813) would seem to have been based on another Bauer drawing altogether). Portions of Plate 24, *Eustrephus latifolius*, were used in black and white as Plate 4 of Endlicher's 'Iconographia' (1838).

Once it had been decided to publish this magnificent volume it was advertised and a prospectus distributed giving details of the intended work and its technical specifications. Although the book sells at £420 it was available by pre-publication subscription at £305 before 1 April 1975. The volume is a folio with a full page size of 18 x 25¼ inches and the greatest care over quality has been taken at all stages of its production. Technical details, together with the names of the firms from Britain, France and Sweden making or supplying the paper for the text, for the plates and for the mounts, or the leather binding material and the special marbled side papers, are set out in an extended colophon on the back page. The book was designed and produced by Peter Guy and a total of 515 copies printed, 500 for sale. Each copy is individually numbered and in order to ensure their continued exclusiveness all the plates were destroyed after printing, with no possibility of the edition being extended or repeated. Furthermore, the Trustees of the British Museum (Natural History) undertook not to allow the drawings appearing in this volume to be reproduced full-sized again by anyone before 30 Nov. 1976 nor thereafter in colour facsimile.

After a short 'Preface' by W.T. Stearn of the British Museum (Natural History), the 'Introduction' by Wilfrid Blunt (Curator of the Watts Gallery, Compton) presents (pp. 9-22) an account of Flinders' voyage — an introduction which is a necessary background for an understanding and full appreciation of the plates that follow. In it we learn much of Matthew Flinders, who was appointed Captain of H.M.S. *Investigator*, an ancient 334 ton sloop, in his 27th year when he was given the task of charting the unknown coast of Australia. For the voyage, Ferdinand Bauer was appointed natural history artist and Robert Brown botanist, the former aged 41 and the latter, released from the army, 28. Most of the 'Introduction,' however, is taken up with the voyage itself, written in a style, the quality of which matches the book, and recounting vividly the conditions under which Brown and Bauer worked, and the course which the ship took, with the landing places where, faced with limited time and a tremendous diversity of new plants, they collected assiduously. The adventures and tragedies suffered by Flinders as a result of his wreck on the Great Barrier Reef and, later, his long imprisonment by the French on Mauritius — while Brown and Bauer worked away in the Port Jackson Colony or visited Tasmania and Norfolk Island respectively — all make fascinating reading.

Of particular significance in this 'Introduction' is the authoritative critique by Wilfrid Blunt of Bauer's work. For many people, Blunt established his position as an undoubted authority on botanical art when in 1950 his book 'The Art of Botanical Illustration' was published. Ferdinand Bauer's style and technique are thus assessed and judged from a background of wide experience and knowledge, and Blunt's praise is praise indeed.

W.T. Stearn follows this 'Introduction' with a chapter entitled 'The Contributions of Robert Brown and Ferdinand Bauer to Australian Botany.' In it Brown is described as the greatest botanist ever to have set foot in Australia. The fame of Brown is essentially based on his acute ability to observe things, recognize their significance and record them; thus, on the voyage, he described every plant directly in Latin in the greatest detail, including in some instances such fine details as the characters of the pollen. He drew up some 6000 descriptions in all — collecting nearly 3900 species, a total which included 1700 new to science and 140 new genera. These careful, meticulous, but still unpublished descriptions today occupy 72 "Solander Boxes" at the British Museum (Natural History). However, just as so little of the work of Banks and Solander on Captain Cook's first voyage was ever published, so it seems a tragedy that the results of such prodigious industry as that shown by Robert Brown should also have lain unpublished, today overtaken at least in part, by other publications. Nevertheless, there is still much of value to be learnt from Brown's descriptions, for few people, if any, have looked so carefully at such a wide range of Australian plants or recorded so methodically their characters. For Australian botanists it is worth noting that his descriptions were microfilmed by Dr. Nancy T. Burbidge in 1953, when she was Australian Liaison Botanist in Britain, and in this form are all available for consultation in Canberra.

Due to the economic climate of the period and the drain on resources caused by the Napoleonic wars, the beginning of the 19th Century was not a time to encourage botanical publications. In 1810, at his own expense, Brown published the beginning of his 'Prodromus Florae Novae Hollandiae.' Volume 1 cost him £93.14.4½d to publish but only 26 of the 250 copies were sold and after this failure in public response he gave up work on the 'Prodromus' altogether. In it, without illustrations, he published not descriptions, but short, succinct diagnoses, and although their scientific excellence has always been held in high regard, the work was no doubt dry and lacking in interest for all but the most knowledgeable and discerning botanists. Even the publication of some of Bauer's drawings met a similar fate. In 1813 he commenced publication of his 'Illustrationes Florae Novae Hollandiae' with the appearance of fifteen plates in three parts, but they met with such a poor reception that only fifty copies were produced. Bauer, depressed by apparent failure returned to his native Austria, presumably taking with him most of his drawings, his own property by agreement before the voyage with Flinders.

The chapter on Brown and Bauer by Stearn is followed by a large map on two facing pages captioned 'The Voyage of H.M.S. *Investigator* and of the *Porpoise* and the *Cumberland*, which were used when the *Investigator* was no longer seaworthy. Showing the localities where the plants illustrated in this volume were collected. Based on Captain Matthew Flinders' "General Chart of Terra Australis". The geographical localities where the plants were collected on this voyage are therefore well documented because in addition to this large and detailed map a small one is printed on the page before each of the 25 individual plates which make up the main part of the volume. They show the places from which the individual species were collected, marked with the symbols in the form of capital letters which were used by Brown to indicate the general areas from which collections were made. These are explained in detail in this volume, as earlier elucidated in Dr. Burbidge's 'Robert Brown's Australian Collecting Localities', published in the *Proceedings of the Linnean Society of New South Wales* 80: 229-233 (1956), or in Stearn's 'Introduction' to the facsimile edition of Robert Brown's 'Prodromus Florae Novae Hollandiae' which was issued in 1960.

It is the selected 25 coloured plates which are the main part of this volume — the primary reason for its publication — which will strike everyone turning to or reading it. Between them they illustrate Bauer's great range of artistry and craftsmanship. The plants illustrated are:

- Plate 1 *Cycas media* R. Br. (Cycadaceae)
- Plate 2 *Hibbertia dealbata* (R. Br.) Benth. (Dilleniaceae)
- Plate 3 *Cochlospermum gillivraei* Benth. (Cochlospermaceae)
- Plate 4 *Alyogyne hakeifolia* (Giord.) Alef. (Malvaceae)
- Plate 5 *Abelmoschus moschatus* Medik. subsp. *tuberosus* (Span.) Borssum (Malvaceae)
- Plate 6 *Flindersia australis* R. Br. (Rutaceae)
- Plate 7 *Callicoma serratifolia* Andr. (Cunoniaceae)
- Plate 8 *Verticordia brownii* (Desf.) DC. (Myrtaceae)
- Plate 9 *Kunzea baxteri* (Klotzsch) Schauer (Myrtaceae)
- Plate 10 *Eucalyptus pruinosa* Schauer (Myrtaceae)
- Plate 11 *Macklinaya macrosciadea* (F. Muell.) F. Muell. (Araliaceae)
- Plate 12 *Nuytsia floribunda* (Labill.) R. Br. ex Fenzl (Loranthaceae)
- Plate 13 *Muellerina eucalyptoides* (DC.) Barlow (Loranthaceae)
- Plate 14 *Stylidium scandens* R. Br. (Stylidiaceae)
- Plate 15 *Brunonia australis* Sm. ex R. Br. (Brunoniaceae)
- Plate 16 *Dracophyllum secundum* R. Br. (Epacridaceae)
- Plate 17 *Myristica insipida* R. Br. (Myristicaceae)
- Plate 18 *Banksia speciosa* R. Br. (Proteaceae)
- Plate 19 *Dendrocnide excelsa* (Wedd.) Chew (Urticaceae)
- Plate 20 *Ottelia ovalifolia* (R. Br.) Rich. (Hydrocharitaceae)

Plate 21 *Dendrobium discolor* Lindl. (Orchidaceae)

Plate 22 *Cymbidium suave* R. Br. (Orchidaceae)

Plate 23 *Diuris maculata* Sm. (Orchidaceae)

Plate 24 *Eustrephus latifolius* R. Br. (Liliaceae)

Plate 25 *Lomandra hastilis* (R. Br.) Ewart (Xanthorrhoeaceae)

These plates have been printed with the greatest care by off-set lithography using up to ten colours per plate, not the usual four or even six colour process. The result is superb. Even though techniques of colour printing have reached a high standard today, witness for example the present-day plates in *Curtis's Botanical Magazine* (where a six colour off-set lithography is used) there is usually a distinct loss when they are compared with the original art work. However, in 'The Australian Flower Paintings of Ferdinand Bauer' when one compares the published plates with the original drawings at the British Museum, as I have been privileged to do, one is struck by the faithfulness of the reproductions. The texture and tone of the originals come through in the printed work and the reproduction of even the finest details, such as hairs and ciliations, is remarkably true.

Each painting, with its corresponding text, can be considered as a separate article, and before each plate the full synonymy of the plant is presented, together with standard and important references and the individual maps mentioned above. These are followed in every case by an interesting account by W.T. Stearn dealing with the particular plant depicted. Usually, this occupies the page facing the plate but in three exceptions, those of *Cycas media*, *Brunonia australis* and *Cymbidium suave*, it overflows, or rather commences, on the previous page beneath the synonymy and map. In these articles Stearn gives the full and detailed Latin description drawn up by Brown while on the voyage in all except for three cases, where they appear to be non-existent, and he contrasts them, where appropriate, with the short diagnoses Brown published in his 'Prodromus'. Stearn also includes interesting facts relating to the plant, especially to each discovery and collection by Brown and Bauer, or by earlier collectors such as Banks and Solander. In nearly every one of the accounts he reveals his interest in plant names by explaining the origin and meaning of the name, either from the Greek or the Latin, or in the case of generic names or epithets based on those of a person's name, by telling something about the person concerned.

A full appreciation of the botany of Australia must include the historical background, and while for some this may be obtained over a period by extensive and wide reading, much may be learned from the text of this volume. Quite apart from the pleasure of viewing Bauer's drawings, anyone who can consult a copy, whether in private hands or public library, will find the text excellently written and informative; with interest and fascination they will quickly learn the important facts about Flinders' voyage and about Robert Brown and Ferdinand Bauer.

As with all good plant books, the volume is completed by an 'Index of Plant Names.' However, considering the sumptuous character of the book, the undoubted care that has been put into its production and the price at which it has been sold, it was with some surprise that I noted a number of small errors, most of them presumably missed in proof: Bauer's drawings made on Norfolk Island in 1804 were not in fact "used to illustrate Stephen Endlicher's 'Prodromus Florae Norfolkicae'" (p. 21) — clearly they had been intended to have been so used, for the text includes reference to them, but they never actually appeared; the generally accepted and correct name for the Norfolk Island pine today is *Araucaria heterophylla* not *Araucaria excelsa* (p. 21) — even though unfortunately this latter is better known; on the contents page we find the combining botanical authority for the name of the plant depicted in Plate 5 spelt as "Borrsum" instead of "Borssum" and further down mention of "van Mueller" instead of "von Mueller"; and the authority for *Stylidium kunthii* is not "Wall ex DC." but Wall. (or Wallich) ex DC. These minor criticisms are trifling though when compared with the general excellence of this work.

If there is one general feeling of unease over this publication, however, it lies in the continued rarity of Bauer's plates. Like many treasures in national museums the world over they are preserved for posterity but rarely seen and certainly not available for study or reference by the general public. As shown years ago by Britten in his paper 'Ferdinand Bauer's Drawings of Australian Plants,' in the *Journal of Botany* 47: 140-146 (1909), a number of Bauer's drawings have been used, yet they constitute but a fraction of his total output and only a few of those which still exist in national collections. For his coloured drawings, only the expensive methods and high quality paper used in this edition can do justice to the full beauty of his work, and as a result publication must be costly, but at what stage is a more lowly priced publication justified, in order to make the drawings available to a wider public, without sacrificing too much quality and yet still doing justice to the artist? The days of exclusive privilege are gradually passing, especially when based on wealth, yet it must be said that at present one must accept that even these 25 plates would never have been published and reproduced 515 times, except in an expensive book — a collector's item from the moment of its advertisement. Nevertheless, however rare these faithful reproductions remain, at least a few copies of a selection of Bauer's drawings are now available in Australia, from whence the subjects originally came, where, in the possession of a fortunate few or in public libraries, botanists and admirers can consult them.